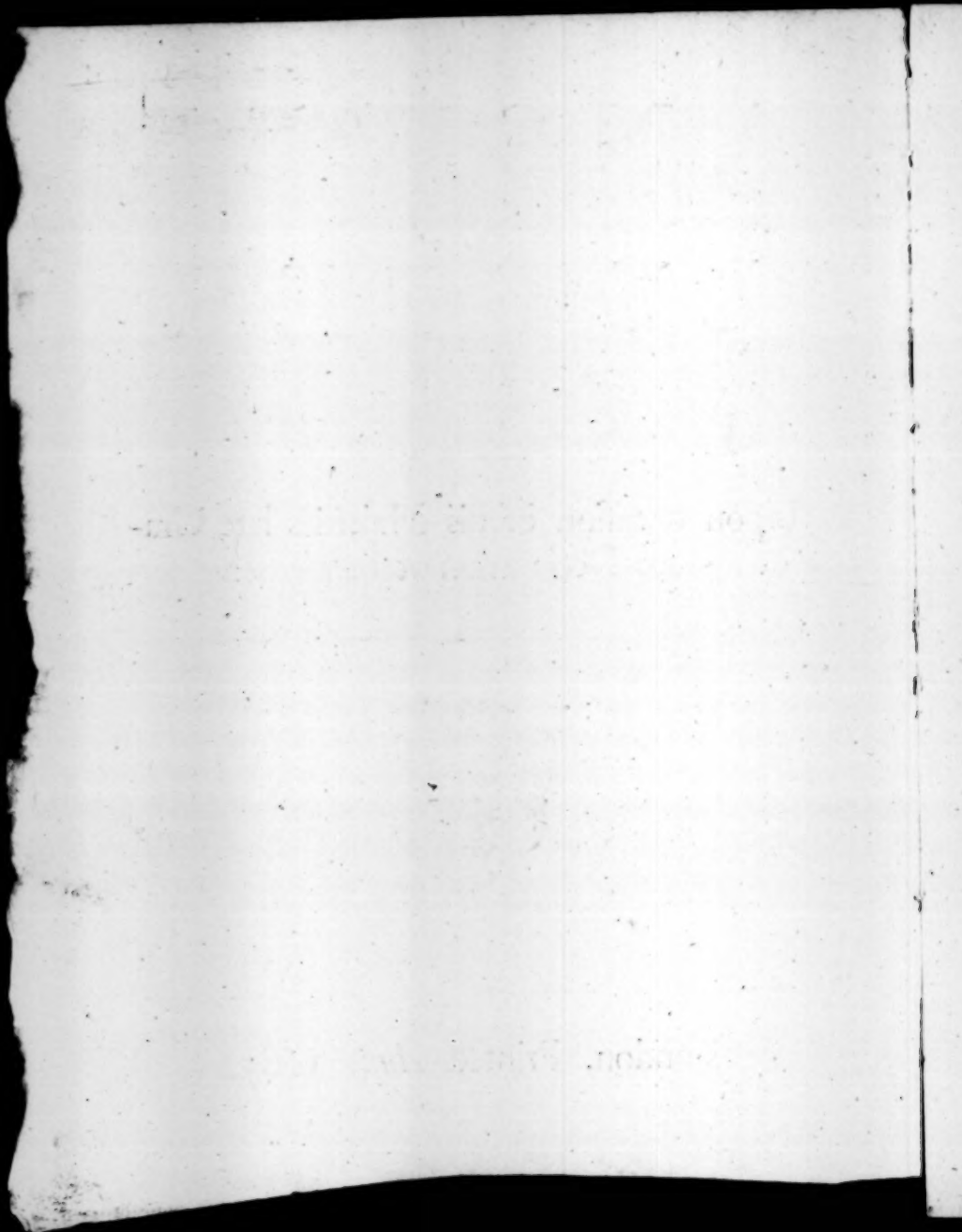


AN
ANSWER
TO A
LETTER
TO A
DISSENTER,

Upon occasion of his Majesties late Gracious Declaration of *Indulgence*.



London, Printed Anno 1687.



An ANSWER to a LETTER to a DISSENTER, &c.

Pardon me, Sir, if I think it is your Interest at least, if not your Fear and Resentment, must be the effect of you addressing the Dissenters at this time, since hitherto Conscience and Religion could never prevail to draw from you any manner of Condescension to them. Truth must at all times carry Conviction with it, unless Interest hinder ; how much it over-ruled you formerly, in what you your selves now own to be Truth, I leave you to judg.

In the mean time it is to be considered whether the Dissenters in this Juncture act contrary to Truth or no ; for if they act according to Truth, let the Clamor of the Church of *England* be never so great, they will be able to justify themselves both to God and Man.

The great Question then will be, whether the Penal Laws be just and equitable Laws, and consistent with the Law of God or not ? If they be not consistent with the Law of God, but quite contrary to the Principles of Christianity, to impose on and enforce Mens Consciences, and inflict Penalties on them for not agreeing in meer Matters of Religion ; then certainly the Dissenters will be found altogether in the right, if they consent to the abrogating of those Laws. It will be but *actum agere* to prove this imposing and persecuting Principle to be quite opposite to the express Rule, Doctrine and Practice of Jesus Christ, it having been sufficiently evinced already, and all Parties now readily acquiesce in it.

And as nothing but Interest at first prevailed in the enacting these persecuting Laws, so I doubt it will be found that the self-same Interest, and not Religion, sways in the continuance of them : for if the Church of *England* for once would lay aside that Idol-Interest, and consider what is agreeable to the Word of God, and what not, and remember that Golden Rule, of *doing unto others as they would be done by*, I am confident she could never be so eager an Advocate for the continuing of these unchristian Laws.

Now as to what advantage the Papists can make by Repealing of the Penal Laws, and the dismal Consequences that will follow, which indeed is all that is considerable in this *Letter*, and which is the frightful Bugbear made use of, it may receive an easy Answer: For no Man of sense will argue that the bare taking away of the Penal Laws is in it self either an establishing of Popery, or destroying of the Church of *England*: The King is most graciously pleased to tell us in his Declaration, that *he will maintain Archbishops, &c.* And that he questions not but his Parliament will so settle a Liberty of Conscience for all his Subjects, as his Successors shall have no cause to alter. Now the Parliament no doubt will go no farther to the settling of *Popery*, or destroying the *Church of England*, than what the King in this his Declaration expects shall be enacted, so that the Penal Laws must be the very essential part of the Church of *England*, if the bare taking away of them, and confirming all her other Rights and Privileges will destroy or prejudice her; for the same Law that gives Liberty to the *Papists* and *Protestant Dissenters*, will as strongly confirm her in every Priviledg and Power, except only one, which is the Power of doing hurt: And since you say, pag. 16. that *the Church of England is convinced of her Error in being severe to the Dissenters*; they have reason to conclude that the Church of *England* will rather thank than be displeased with them, for taking from her the means and Temptation of her ever falling into the like Error again.

As to what you say page 3, 4. about the new Friendship of the *Dissenters*, and the little Truth to be expected from the *Papists Performances*; let it be as you say: yet I know of no Dissenter is shaking hands, or entring into any Engagements with them, more than what is natural to all Men to desire, and endeavour, a free and undisturbed Exercise of their Religion according to the Conviction of their Consciences. And how little to your purpose is that Paragraph, pag. 3. where you say, *Wine is not more expressly forbidden to Mahometans, than giving Hereticks liberty to the Papists*. For how doth it follow, that because we give them Liberty, that therefore our Liberty must be precarious from them, when the same Law will give the Church of *England* her Preheminence in Powers, Revenues, and all other Advantages and Emoluments, and the *Papists* the bare Liberty of the Profession of their Religion? Were it intended indeed to divest and strip the Church of *England* of all her rich and splendid Attirements, and cloath the *Papists* with them, the Argument might

might carry more force in it. But it takes from the Church only the worst and vilest of her Garments, and which she her self is now ashamed to appear in, and leaves her all the rest. *Pag. 3.* you say *the Papists cannot have Absolution, if they continue their Kindness.* You need not be beholden to them for any Kindness, for the Law will continue all to you, without any Kindness to be expected from them; so that the Principle concludes amiss, and you will have no occasion to put them on such difficulties to get their Absolution. And *pag. 3, Whatever their Skill in Chirurgery is, you say the worst that ever pretended to it at Healing;* there is another Church hath as bad a Faculty at Healing: But I am sure, we have had of late one Sovereign Plaister which has given a great deal of ease, when other inexpert Physicians had festered and made the Wound almost incurable.

Pag. 4. As to what you say to the *Papists treatment of those that think them guilty of Idolatry,* is not to the purpose: for you proceed on this false Principle, That the Papists are to have the Power in their hands, whereas the Intent of the Law is, that no one sort of Men shall hurt any other for differing from them in their Principles, and this to be secured as firm as the Laws can make it; so that as to the Consequences that may happen from the *Papists*, if any thing can be rationally concluded in your *Letter*, it must be from hence that the Papists are to be invested with all the Power, when no such thing, but the quite contrary is to be enacted.

As to the Matter of *Addressing*, 'tis strange the Church of *England* should oppose it: for if the King be Supreme Head of the Church, as they have sufficiently preach'd and printed, the King must have a Power to dispense with Penal Laws; for all our Lawyers agree the *King* to have the same Power as the *Pope* had in Ecclesiastical Dispensations; and that the *Pope* had a Power to dispense with the Penal Laws in matters of Religion, especially in *malis prohibitis*, was never questioned. And without doubt 'tis not that the King doubts his Power in dispensing, that makes him desirous to have the Penal Laws taken off by Parliament, but that he designs his Subjects may have the Liberty of their Consciences, as well in future times, as they are sure to enjoy it during his Reign; and why the *Dissenters* should not thank him for exerting that Power thus seasonably, I cannot comprehend, only thus much we gather from some Mens Principles, that as long as the King complied with their Desires, the Prerogative was strained to the highest, but as soon as he acts contrary

trary to their Humours and Interest, though in the most just and necessary occasion that ever was, great is the Cry, and the Dissenters, because they address the King for this necessary and legal Dispensation, must be charged with giving a Blow to all Laws, and voluntary Aggressors of *Magna Charta*, so that the Dissenters (notwithstanding this specious Address) may from hence guess *ex pede Herculem*, what Entertainment they are like to have from you, if you once again have the Power over them, having already pronounced them so great Delinquents in this Particular: and may they (say I) suffer accordingly, if they give it you again when it lies in their power to take it from you: But I could wish the Church of *England* had been no more Aggressors of *Magna Charta* than the Dissenters are in this, or any other Particular.

As to what you say P. 5. *about the Instruments of this new Friendship, and their being brib'd, &c.* I look on it as all Calumny, the old way of dealing with the Dissenters, *fortius calumniare aliquid adhibebit*: But however, I see no harm there is to take Money to do a good Thing, as I am sure the taking off these unchristian-like Laws will be.

But for the *Circular Letters, and tying the Post-Horses*, P. 7. You take up this I suppose at guess only, by what you your selves did in the case of Abhorrences to the late King, but drop Instances in that particular as soon as you please.

But you threaten highly, and tell the Dissenters, P. 12. That the Church of England can in a Moment bring Clouds again, and turn the Royal Thunder upon our Heads, blow us off the Stage with a Breath; if she would but give a Smile or a kind Word, the least glimpse of her compliance would throw the Dissenters back into their former state of Suffering: But she (good Church) will not allow her self to be rescued by such unjustifiable means, but chuseth to bear the Weight of Power, rather than lye under the Burthen of being Criminal. Now what the Sense of this studied Paragraph is, or what weight it is that the King is going to put upon her, I cannot imagine, unless she reckons Arch-Bishops, Bishops, &c. to be a Weight; and indeed they have been a dead and heavy Weight to some People: But of this Weight, I suppose, she may be eased as soon as she pleaseth: And that she will not thank the King for easing her of what disgraceth her, and of which she her self is now ashamed, she must, I think, in the Sense of all sober Men still lye under the Burthen of being Criminal.

But

But she deals very sawcily methinks with the *Royal Thunderer*, as if she with a Smile could alter what he hath so solemnly declared he will continue during his Reign: But why should she that hath so strongly maintained that the Word of the King is Sacred, imagine that for a Smile from her he would so easily alter his Sacred Word? The Reason is plain; she maintained his Word to be Sacred, when she thought he would regulate himself by her stinted Principles; but now she sees that he acts by a more Divine and Generous Principle, the Case is altered, tho he is still the same to her, for he maintains her in all her Grandeur, Rights and Priviledges, according to his Word: But certainly she was much to blame to imagine that when he promised to maintain her, he would so maintain her as to give her Power to destroy all others.

But that *Pag. 3.* where you say that they (the Roman Catholicks) are no more able to make good their Vows, than Men married before, and their Wife alive, can confirm their Contract with another Woman: You are to be hugged now, that you may be squeez'd at another time: We know 'tis the King hath made this Vow or Promise to us, that we shall enjoy this Liberty during his Reign; now that such Language should proceed from Loyal Church-men is very strange, so that if the Government do but in the least thwart them, 'tis not their Doctrine of *Passive Obedience* and *Submission* can keep them within bounds, but they must squint on the Government.

But you seem to speak very fairly, *P. 16.* That the Foundation must be enlarged, and an agreement made amongst Protestants against the common Enemy. And is the Church really in earnest in this Point! Or perhaps she thinks she can put any thing upon the easy good-natured Dissenters, whom she will hug at present, that she may squeeze them hereafter: But the Dissenters I hope will not swallow such a gilded Pill; For why did not the Church of *England* agree to this in the *Westminster Parliament*, when the Bill of Comprehension was proposed, a very seasonable time for so good and so great a Work, and sav'd all this Trouble, but instead of that, they fell to Violence and Persecution, and at this instant threaten severely, and would no doubt be at the same glorious Work again, had not the King in his great Mercy put a stop to it?

But the next Heir, you say *P. 16.* and all things will conspire to give the Dissenters ease and satisfaction, if they do not anticipate and destroy it themselves. How far the Church of *England* may influence the next Successor, bred in her Bosom, and not in that Countrey you speak of,
and

and of a Sex easier to be prevailed with, the Dissenters have no reason to hazard, since nothing but the Great, Noble, and generous Resolution of our present Prince could break through the daily and continued Sollicitations of the Church of *England* to the contrary.

P. 10. *You bid us consider and take warning by the Church of Englands mistake in the same kind, when after the late King's Restoration they preserved so long the bitter taste of the Dissenters rough usage towards them in other times, that it made the Church of England forget their interest, and sacrifice it to their revenge.* The Case indeed is worth considering; by their Revenge, I suppose, you mean the enacting and executing of those severe Penal Laws upon the *Dissenters*; a Revenge, I must confess with a Witness! But, Sir, the Dissenters will consider this Case seriously, and deal more fairly by the Church than the Church dealt by them; they will neither enact, nor execute any Penal Laws against the Church of *England*; but on the contrary, they, as the King hath been pleased to declare, will consent to confirm all Archbishops, Bishops, &c. And likewise to enact, That neither Papist, nor any other shall have power to hurt the Church in the Profession of her Religion, or the Possession of her Rich Temporalities; and humbly crave only at her hands, that they may have by the same Law, the free Exercise of their Religion in Peace and Quietness; And hope the Church will not refuse them so small a pittance.

Now, Sir, if the Church be not satisfied herein, it will tempt Men to conclude, that her eager desire to have these Laws continued, is with a design to put them at a proper season in execution again; and that she cannot be satisfied in any thing less than a Power of Persecution, since all her other Priviledges will be confirm'd to her, and that only taken from her.

FINIS.